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ABSTRACT

The categorization of individual theories co-existing within the feminist framework limits the extent to which these theories can be woven together to fully develop the field of composition. By focusing on differences, taxonomies ignore the similarities among the framework's various theories. These similarities, when interlaced instead of separated, enhance theories, research methods, and practices, which in turn develop previously unrealized insights into the field. If the various feminist theoretical assumptions of how gender and language interact were intertwined, composition instructors would be better able to develop not only their own voices through writing, but also their perspectives on how the interaction of social factors, such as language and gender, create, maintain, as well as challenge gender-specific roles. Specifically, three schools of feminism that might be interwoven are as follows: (1) liberal feminism, which maintains that female subordination is a result of unequal social and legal practices that deny women access to individual rights; (2) psychoanalytic feminism, which regards gendered oppression and marginality as a result of differences between female and male psychological development; (3) the socialist feminist approach explains how capitalism has separated the domestic from the public work sphere based on the capital value of each domain. Treating most women's problems as the problems of the middle-class woman, all three approaches, however, could be critiqued for their failure to adequately consider issue of class, race and age. (Contains 37 references.) (TB)

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Weaving Theoretical Threads:
Liberal, Psychoanalytic, Socialist Feminisms and Composition Theory

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Introduction: Exclusion and Categorization

Over the past twenty years feminism as a theoretical framework has significantly altered the theory and practice of composition studies. In sorting out the various feminisms to determine which have most shaped the current texture of composition, I find that the discipline of composition has been affected by only a few feminist theories. The exclusion of certain feminisms reflects the traditional, androcentric ideology that maintains the institution of education. These excluded perspectives, for example, radical feminism advocating destruction rather than reform of the social system, are those threatening the very existence of the current patriarchal social system and its institutions. In other words, the institution of education and the field of composition as elements of a social system that privileges the male and "masculine" language forms and uses, have denied some feminisms access to the composition classroom. Thus, these feminisms have had less of an impact on writing theory than others because their approaches do not fit neatly with the ideology that patterns composition.

In addition to the exclusion of certain feminisms, the categorization of individual theories co–existing within the feminist framework limits the extent to which these theories can be woven together to fully develop the field of composition. By focusing on differences, taxonomies ignore the similarities among the framework's various theories. These similarities, when interlaced instead of separated, enhance theories, research methods, and practices, which in turn develop previously unrealized insights into a field. If the various feminist theoretical assumptions of how gender and language interact were intertwined, composition instructors could better enable students to develop not only their own voices through writing, but also their perspectives on how the interaction of social factors, such as language and gender, create, maintain, as well as challenge gender–specific roles. Developing students' personal perspectives could then lead to social changes advocated by feminist theorists. Furthermore, although theories are spun from different fibers and thus approach pedagogy and learning from different perspectives, their approaches to

writing often overlap. Likewise, theorists' perspectives are often interwoven with various feminist approaches to language and gender.

Although not neatly separate theoretically nor methodologically, three feminisms that have significantly influenced theories and practices of composition are the liberal, psychoanalytic, and socialist perspectives. These three approaches have shaped theories and methods of writing. They have also affected the development of composition as an academic discipline. I will discuss these theories in relationship to my perspectives on why composition has adopted some feminisms while excluded others, and how the categorization of theories limits their practice and thus the development of students, their writing, the field of composition, and the prospect for social change. As I discuss each approach I will be drawing from not only feminist theories that are specific to the field of composition, but also those that are grounded in the disciplines of communication, linguistics, and literature. This fuzzy texturing is furthered by my descriptions of the three approaches and their proponents. For example, in certain ways my characterization of socialist feminism could also be labeled as postmodern feminism. My listing of specific researchers under the heading of psychoanalytic approaches, whose work might be more akin to psychology rather than psychoanalysis, is also a point of debate. This entwining of theories and theorists, as well as my interdisciplinary approach to examining feminist theories as they relate to composition, mirrors the weft and warp of the weave that patterns feminist theories of language.

The Liberal Approach

Based on the tradition of libertarian politics that arose in the mid–1700s, which is grounded in the belief of individual rights and protection of these human rights by the state, liberal feminism maintains that female subordination is a result of unequal social and legal practices that deny women access to individual human rights. These practices are produced and upheld by the rationale of a sexist social system. In order to correct the unjust system, laws and social practices must be changed to include equal rights and opportunities for women and men.

This approach has been critiqued as classist in that it ignores social factors--race, age, and class--that determine a variety of positions for women in society. Liberal feminism tends to treat all women's problems as those of the white, middle–class woman, thus ignoring cultural and historical influences (cf. Flynn, "Feminist Writing" 3; Tong 37; Weiler 28). Moreover, instead of questioning the values of the system, liberal feminism merely adopts these "male" values as human values, applying them to women and men alike, without consideration of how genders are formed and treated differently within the social system (Flynn, "Feminist Writing" 3; Tong 31–33). For the liberal feminist, change comes not from the transformation of the social system itself, but from eradication of unequal social practices, such as gender–specific laws.

Despite its shortcomings, liberal feminism has affected the theory and practice of composition in a number of ways, perhaps more than any other feminist approach. The Modern Language Association, The National Council for Teachers of English, The Linguistic Society of America[1], and the American Psychological Association, all of which set standards for language use within academic communities, have adopted the liberal feminist approach in their guidelines for language use. The acceptance of the liberal feminist approach to language by academic communities reflects the theory's non–threatening solutions.

Liberal feminism does not require the field of composition to change its structure or theories. Instead, it calls for the language of the discipline to eliminate sexist usage. Liberal feminism asserts that language works to create and maintain cultural beliefs, attitudes, and values, therefore a change in language use will be followed by changes in social values and attitudes. Likewise, sexism is instantiated through sexist linguistic practices. "In Hearing is Believing: The Effect of Sexist Language on Language Skills", Alice Freed explains that "the failure to bring about linguistic change (that is, to eliminate sexism from language) promises to perpetuate the sexist attitudes that are being formed, communicated and constantly reinforced" (88).

Yet liberal feminism does not seek for the language itself to change, rather it requires that gender–specific forms and uses be eliminated from the language (Flynn, "Feminist Writing" 3; Freed 88; McConnell–Ginet 12; C. Miller 268–269; Spender 28–32). For example, in the liberal feminist composition classroom, writers are encouraged to use plural nouns and pronouns in order to eliminate the problem of using the gender–specific pronouns 'he' and 'she' or the awkward 'she/he' and 'she or he'. Writers also avoid using gender–marked referents, such as 'lady doctor' or 'forefathers'. Writers are taught to avoid gender–typed representations of women and men in their writing. For instance, they would not use images of the "dumb jock" or "blonde bimbo", unless, of course, the purpose of the paper was to discuss gender–related biases.

In order to help students recognize sexist language practices and its affects on values and thus on social practices, liberal feminist pedagogy relies on readings, discussions, and writings of unfair language usage and how sexism in language reflects the ideology of the culture. Social equality evolves from the recognition and change of linguistic sexism. Freed suggests students keep journals in which they collect examples of sexist comments that they hear, record examples from class and campus group readings and discussions, and describe experiences that have made them or others uncomfortable because of their gender. Students then write essays based on the journal entries (86). Catherine Lamb uses collaborative discussion and writing groups to teach mediation instead of the traditional monologic argument, theoretically deemed a "masculine" language form (20–21). Similarly, Dale Bauer teaches "how signs can be manipulated, appropriated, and also liberated" to develop students' recognition of social signs, which leads to social change (391). What each of these practices has in common is that they eliminate sexist language forms and usage in order to develop an awareness of sexism, which in turn leads to social change, with the hope of eliminating sexism.

The Psychoanalytic Approach

Similar to liberal feminism, the psychoanalytic feminist approach to language tends to focus on the interrelationship of the individual with the social; individual action is shaped by social rationales. This interrelationship is particularly evident in Lacan's interpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis, as Laurie Fink notes in "Knowledge as Bait: Feminism, Voice, and the Pedagogical Unconscious":

> If , as Lacan argued, the psyche is organized as language, then, like language, it must be a social process explained in terms of ideology...as those lived practices, meanings, and values that effectively ensure the maintenance and reproduction of social power...[P]syche must be construed as a social and ideological process, constituted by and within language and culture and not some kind of private interiority. (12)

However, unlike liberal feminism that perceives sexism as a result of unjust social practices, psychoanalytic feminism regards gendered oppression and marginality as a result of differences between female and male psychological development. And as Fink writes, these psychological differences manifest as the "lived practices, meanings, and values" that maintain power relationships within social structures.

Although grounded in Freudian psychology, feminist psychoanalysis significantly differs from Freudian theories of female sexuality. As summarized by Rosemarie Tong, Freudian psychoanalysis relates female inferiority to girls' lack of a penis. Without a penis, girls do not have fear of castration, which in turn gives them no motivation, as it does for boys, to be obedient rule followers. Consequently, boys are obedient rule followers and they have a strong sense of justice. Yet, girls, because of their lack of incentive, do not have a well–developed sense of morality. In addition, psychological development is affected by gendered maternal relationships (139–143). It is this notion of a developed sense of morality and how it is affected by maternal relationships that is challenged in various ways by in feminists such as Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan, Madeline Grumet, Nel Noddings, and Carol Stranger.

Although their individual approaches, like those of other feminist theorists, are often eclectic, what specifically marks these writers as grounded in the field of psychology is that they deconstruct the notions of morality and reason and put them into various feminist frameworks. For Nel Noddings the framework is based on the ethics of caring. She develops this idea in *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* . Similarly, in *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* , Madeline Grumet argues for the feminization of world values, which is developed through nurturing and mothering. Both Gilligan's work, *In a Different Voice: Psychoanalytic Theory and Women's Development* , and *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, by Belenky et al. address the issues of moral and intellectual development, respectively, and how these are shaped by gendered experiences. The connection among these theories exists within their notions of gendered experiences and how they are affected by maternal relationships.

In spite of what psychoanalytic feminism brings to the understanding of gendered psychological growth, it neglects to take into account social factors that affect individual development (Tong 172). In other words, psychoanalytic feminism ignores how socio–economic structures, such as class and race, interact with individuals to determine their experiences and development. And as with liberal feminism, psychoanalytic feminism tends to be based on the experiences of white, middle class women, which for a theory grounded in individual experience, is ironically limiting.

Nevertheless, psychoanalytic feminism has contributed insight into the different ways female and male students approach writing. As Elizabeth Flynn suggests in "Composing as a Woman", "If women and men differ in their relational capacities and in their moral and intellectual development, we would expect to find manifestations of these differences in student papers" (427). And in fact, composition researchers, such as Flynn as well as Lucille McCarthy and Stephen

Fishman, have found that student writing tends to reflect what Belenky et al. have coined "different ways of knowing". In short, writing from female students often reflects connections and interactions with people, whereas writing from male students typically represents individual achievements and separation from a group. Psychoanalytic feminism relates these contrasting gendered representations to the differences in girls' and boys' relationships with their mothers. While girls experience continued biological and psychoanalytic identification with their mothers, boys experience separation and loss. These experiences are then expressed in higher level cognitive processes such as reasoning, speech, and writing.

In order to accommodate the gendered differences in writing, psychoanalytic feminist composition practitioners focus instruction on readings, discussions, and writings of gender roles (Belenky et al. 198–204; Daümer and Runzo 54; Flynn, "Composing" 432–434; Riemer 157–160). Student writing, both in journal entries and more formal essays, typically focuses on the writer's self introspection of values and attitudes in relation to the class readings and discussions (Riemer 157–160). Instead of teaching traditional analytic modes that privilege male experience and reasoning, instructors encourage the use of autobiographical and narrative forms, as these expressive modes allow students to write their own experience. By having students write about their experiences in relation to gender roles, composition teachers hope to make students aware of how experience and value systems are created by gendered relationships to the world. This awareness leads to individual empowerment, especially for female students (Flynn, "Composing" 434).

The Socialist Approach

The socialist feminist perspective has developed mainly as reaction to Marxist feminism, however, the socialist approach has also evolved from liberal and psychoanalytic traditions. Marxist feminism explains how capitalism has separated the domestic from the public work sphere based on the capital value of each domain. Socialist feminism builds on the idea of the separation

of the private from the public workplace to explain how this separation became gendered; the private workplace became relegated to women and the public arena partitioned to men (Tong 174).

The gendered division of the world is the basis of liberal and psychoanalytic feminisms as well. The difference among the three theories lies in their approaches to this split. Liberal feminism analyzes the division from the perspective of sexist social constraints. Psychoanalytic feminism approaches the separation from the different ways in which women and men develop psychological processes. Socialist feminism bridges these two perspectives to explain how social constraints and individual development are the results of socio–economic forces that engender individuals to female and male social roles.

The limitations of socialist feminism are similar to those of the psychoanalytic and liberal approaches in that it tends to perceive women's oppression as a universal result of patriarchal systems. The perspective bases its assumptions of the social systems of "western" societies without consideration of how, or if, the theory applies cross–culturally. Likewise, the socialist perspective ignores how race, class, and age affect the role of women in society; theorists tend to base their assumptions on the experiences of white, middle–class women. Unique to the socialist perspective, however, is that it substitutes the category of capitalism and its affects on society with the category of patriarchy and its affects on gender. This premise disregards the different socio–historical forces that shape both class and gender.

The appeal of the socialist feminist approach to contemporary composition theorists is its eclectic and inclusive perspective. For composition specialists such as Lynn Worsham, Susan Miller, Michael Apple, Susan Jarrett, Dale Bauer, David Bleich, Sue Ellen Holbrook, Linda Brodkey, and Kathleen Weiler, socialist feminism advances composition theory as well as explains the marginalized position of the discipline within the academy. Specifically, from the socialist feminist viewpoint, the marginalized position of composition is a consequence of its function

within the institution of education and the role of women in the university workforce (cf. Apple; Holbrook; Jarrett; S. Miller; Weiler).

In the socialist feminist composition classroom, teachers use cultural criticism to develop students' awareness of the socio–economic forces that affect their gendered positions in society. Typically, discussion, reading, and writing focus on the school's function in reproducing gender divisions and oppression (Bauer 391; Weiler 57–66; Worsham 101). According to both Weiler and Jarrett, among others, by directly addressing social forces that determine students' roles in society, specifically the institution of education, instructors lead students to recognize how the dominant culture functions to socialize its members. As Jarrett explains, "They create a classroom in which personal experience is important material but openly acknowledge that differences exist and cause conflicts" (119). This recognition leads to questioning and resistance, which in turn legitimize students' voices.

If students learn to challenge accepted behaviors and attitudes in the classroom, they question and resist the dominant ideology, which Weiler describes as "embedded in socially and historically created relationships" (125). This awareness and resistance develops into social action (Bauer 392–395; Jarrett 121, S. Miller, "The Feminization" 51; Weiler 59, 63, 71; Worsham 101–102). Similar to the liberal feminist perception that change in social factors leads to the transformation of social attitudes, and the psychoanalytic feminist position that recognition of the relationship among experience, value systems, and gendered relationships develops individual empowerment, the socialist feminist approach sees awareness of, and resistance to, the dominant ideology as forces of social change.

Conclusion: Language, the fiber spinning separate threads

The three feminist approaches to writing that I have discussed bring conflicting as well as complementary perspectives to the teaching of composition. As a result of the different theoretical

traditions shaping each approach, the feminisms support seemingly conflicting pedagogical methods and goals. However, the goal of any feminism in the composition classroom is to use language--reading, writing, talking, listening--to teach students to recognize how their gendered roles in society are created and maintained. Like the stitch that weaves different yarns into one pattern, the common function of language unites these three feminisms. Yet, it is the various approaches to language which also separate one framework from the other--where the liberal and socialist perspectives see language as a social construction reflecting gendered roles, psychoanalytic feminism recognizes language as a means of individual expression.

Consequently, in liberal and socialist feminist composition classrooms, social criticism is approached through collaborative discussion and writing groups, whereas self introspection is typically taught in the psychoanalytic classroom through individual reading and writing. Although collaboration typically leads to consensus, and thus defeating the purpose of deconstructing hegemonic ideologies, as argued by both Greg Myers in "Reality, Consensus and Reform in the Rhetoric of Composition Teaching" and John Trimbur in "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning", group learning in liberal and socialist feminist classrooms does enable students to work more according to their own agendas and to develop their own voices.

In the psychoanalytic feminist classroom, self expression and introspection are best developed through individual journal and essay writing. These private conversations between students and teachers are based on reading assignments created by instructors, according to their agendas. Because the value of the conversation is evaluated by the teacher, there is little opportunity for the student to question or resist what is being taught, especially if the student uses a different "way of knowing" than what is taught in the classroom.

Nevertheless, each feminism seeks to develop student awareness of how gender is created through social experience and interaction. This interaction is grounded in language use. The

gendered individual cannot exist in isolation; interaction among individuals through language maintains theoretical assumptions of gender role formation for each of these perspectives. Similarly, the well–developed individual cannot exist without the skill of critical thinking that develops self awareness and social criticism. In the composition classroom, students use language to develop their awareness through reading, talking, listening, and writing. In this context, language is the fiber spinning the separate threads of liberal, socialist, and psychoanalytic feminisms that enables students to recognize aspects and influences of gender within their personal experiences as well as in society.

Notes

1. Ironically, considering the goals and principles of the organization, the LSA merely provides its members suggestions, rather than set standards, for non–sexist language use in written and oral presentations. However, the Society does require members to use a specific style for manuscript format, grammar, and mechanics (Linguistic Society of America 58).

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